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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Women in Law and Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. Women in Law and Development in Africa is a pan-African network that brings together 23 African countries,[1] organizations and individuals and employs a variety of tools, including legislation, to promote a culture that fosters the exercise of and respect for women's rights in Africa. The network's vision is of a world in which women are able to enjoy all their human rights.

2. The network welcomes the choice of the theme for the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which will offer an opportunity to raise awareness and strengthen action aimed at ensuring that African women are able to exercise their right to education, participation, training, science and technology.

3. The network is particularly concerned that – notwithstanding the commitments made by States through various international and regional legal instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and international platforms such as the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing in 1995 – African women and girls generally continue to have less access to education than men.

4. Consequently, illiteracy is still high among women, especially in rural areas, where five to seven in ten women can neither read nor write. Levels of scientific and technical literacy are especially low among women, who are also poorly represented in scientific careers.

5. Education about women's rights – a forceful tool for empowering women and raising public awareness with a view to ensuring women's ability to exercise their right to education – is still the poor stepchild of human rights education and is left mainly to women's rights organizations that have inadequate means to meet existing needs. This situation prevails in a context in which ignorance of women's rights, both among the general public and among women themselves, is one of the primary causes of the violations of those rights and the de facto discrimination that are, in turn, at the root of the poverty suffered by African women.

6. The inability of rural women to exercise their right to education exacerbates their already poor access to agricultural knowledge, science and technology, despite the important role they play in agriculture and food security. As a result, they perform their work under gruelling conditions, are relegated to traditional subsistence farming and are less economically competitive at the local, national and international levels.

7. The network's activities in various countries, especially in West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo) have shown that:

- Women farmers who have been educated about their political, civil, economic and social rights have utilized that knowledge for their own economic and

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

[1] Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

social empowerment and have contributed to positive change in their communities, which they have mobilized around issues raised by violations of women's rights;

- Women farmers are aware of their role in regard to involvement in science, technology and research, but face enormous difficulties in participating in activities that are still largely the domain of men who are farm managers and meet requirements with respect to access to land, credit, minimum basic education level and availability to benefit from such activities.

8. Women in Law and Development in Africa,

Determined to work towards a society in which all men and all women enjoy equal rights, particularly in the areas of education, training, science and technology;

Convinced that agricultural knowledge, science and technology can enhance the contribution of African women to agriculture and thus to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those relating to poverty eradication and gender equality;

Calls on:

Official delegations to urge States, with support from development partners, to:

- invest more in the education of women and girls, with special emphasis on training in science and technology to ensure that women as a group benefit from technological progress and are better able to access employment and decent work on an equal footing with men;

- strengthen the capacity of women farmers to participate and to utilize science, technology and research in their work, applying a community-based technology development approach and seeking to create an enabling environment for their effective participation in science and technology activities, including research;

- step up, with the participation of civil society, their human rights education activities, focusing in particular on women's rights, especially in rural areas.

Civil society organizations to redouble their efforts with regard to:

- advocacy activities aimed at promoting State policies and programmes that will create conditions conducive to effective access for women and girls in all social and occupational groups to education and to science and technology and that will respond to literacy needs from a functional perspective, including women's rights;

- women's rights advocacy and education programmes designed to make women and girls in all social and occupational groups, including those in rural areas, aware of their rights with a view to empowering them and enabling them to make a greater contribution to the development of their communities and their countries.

Development partners to: ,

- tailor their development aid to the needs and interests of women and girls in terms of formal and informal education, including education on women's rights and access to science and technology, in line with the Paris Declaration

on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action and other development financing commitments.